2002. However. it is expected the figure would be the same as it was during Haj 2002 viz 1,20,000 pilgrims out of which 72,000 pilgrims are expected to go through the Haj Committee Mumbai.

5. The improvements and innovations of Haj Management of Indian pilgrims is a continuous exercise. The Government regularly reviews past experience and is constantly exploring ways to further improve Haj management every year.

Portraying of South Africans of Indian Origin

2407. DR. C. NARAYANA REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that in South Africa a song was written portraying South Africans of Indian origin as oppressors of black people;

(b) if so, whether Government have taken up the issue with the Government of South Africa; and

(c) if so, the outcome thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) and (b) Yes Sir.

(c) The Ministry continues to carefully monitor the evolving situation, through its Mission and posts in South Africa. Most of the people of Indian origin in South Africa are South African citizens. South Africa is trying to resolve the issue in the context of its liberal and non-racial Constitution and its commitment to democracy.

Simplification of issuance of Passport

2408. SHRI K.M. KHAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have recently decided to simplify the procedure for issuing of passports to citizens without any hassles and hindrance;

(b) if so, the details of the measures taken in this regard;

(c) whether Government have decided to open more Regional Passport Offices across the country; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Several measures have been taken to simplify the procedures for issuing of passports without any hassles and hindrance. A committee to review the Passport issue system was set up by the Government. As per the recommendations of the Committee the following measures have been taken towards simplification and streamlining of the procedure: (i) issue of passports on the basis of post police verification to senior citizens aged 65 years and above if any of their adult children has a valid passport; (ii) issue of passport without police verification (a) in case of reissue/renewal of passports including issue of duplicate passports in case of loss and issue of additional booklets, (b) to children up-to 15 years of age with at least one of the parents possessing a valid passport, (c) to retired government servants who have held an official or a diplomatic passport while in service and (d) to government servants who produce a 'No Objection Certificate' from their Department. Besides, several other measures to simplify and streamline the procedure for issue of passports are also being implemented. These measures are: (a) introduction of Tatkal Scheme for issue of out-of-trun passport, (b) decentralisation of passport services to enable submission of completed application form at designated speed post centres at district level, (c) provision of dispatch of passport by speed post and (d) submission of passport applications at district level through the offices of District Magistrate/Superintendent of Police.

The Government have also undertaken a major task of modernisation of Passport Offices. This includes (a) computerisation of processing procedures, (b) machine writing of passports, (c) scanning of passport files, (d) dissemination of information on touch-screen kiosks and on the internet, (e) status enquiry on the internet/mobile phone, (f) on-line registeration of passport applications.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) A new Passport Office was opened at Ranchi (Jharkhand) on 24.7.2002. There is a proposal to establish new passport offices at Deharadum (Uttaranchal), Raipur (Chhattisgarh), Shimla (Himachal Pradesh) and Surat (Gujarat).

Rates of accommodation abroad

2409. SHRI RAJNATH SINGH "SURYA": Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any rate has been fixed for accommodation for officers